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Around the World and Back: A Tale of Two MSC Microbiologists

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By Lt. Cmdr. Maya Williams and Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Kasper, Naval Medical Research Center



Each duty station has brought with it a new set of experiences and challenges; however, the one constant is the passion for research and development in Navy R&D.

Editor's note: August 4th marks the 67th birthday of the Medical Service Corps. Lt. Cmdr. Maya Williams, Head of the Viral and Rickettsial Diseases Department at Naval Medical Research Center and Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Kasper, Deputy Director for the Global Emerging Infections Surveillance and Response System at Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC-GEIS) share their experience as a dual-military couple working in research and development (R&D) while serving as Medical Service Corps Officers.

After completing PhDs at the University of Michigan, we decided to join the [Navy Microbiology program](#). We weren't sure exactly what lay ahead of us, but we were ready for an adventure and so far our first nine years have not let us down. Our duty stations have included the [National Naval Medical Center](#) in Bethesda, Md.; the [Naval Medical Research](#)

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[Center](#) in Silver Spring, Md.; the [U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No.2 \(NAMRU-2\)](#) in Jakarta, Indonesia; the [U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No.6 \(NAMRU-6\)](#) in Lima, Peru; and, AFHSC-GEIS in Silver Spring, Md.

Each duty station has brought with it a new set of experiences and challenges; however, the one constant has been the many “hats” that you must wear while working in Navy R&D. Not only do you have to be a great scientist, but you must also flourish as a leader, diplomat, and businessman. While working overseas you also have the added challenge of doing all of this with cultural sensitivity and the understanding that we are guests of the host nation. During our overseas tours we had the opportunity to work with other U.S. government agencies and a variety of host-nation partners on mutually beneficial infectious disease projects.



After completing PhDs at the University of Michigan, we decided to join the Navy Microbiology program.

We visited both remote and urban field sites, oversaw operations, and met a wide range of study participants and local health care providers. We have been involved in the response to a number of emerging diseases including the deadly H5N1 bird flu, the novel H1N1 influenza pandemic, dengue outbreaks, the emergence of MERS-CoV and the introduction of chikungunya virus into the Americas. We are grateful that we have had the opportunity to execute the force health protection mission on a global scale and play a key role in global health security.

There are many challenges to working overseas, most of which cannot be explained in words, but must simply be experienced firsthand. Now that we are back in the U.S., we use those experiences to advance Navy R&D efforts of to enhance the force health protection mission. Our nine years of service has provided us the opportunity to develop a diverse set of professional skills. We look forward to the future opportunities that are in store as we continue to advance force health protection and global health efforts.

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